

Melancholy Suicide of Samuel Wakeman – Inquest on the body

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An inquest was held at the General Cameron Hotel yesterday, before Dr Philson, coroner, on view of the body of Samuel Wakeman, who committed suicide by poisoning himself on the previous day. The following names were sworn as the jury:- Thomas Londergan, James Rogers, William Wilkinson, William Langbridge, John Grimley, Richard Lloyd, James Carr, William Sadgrove, James Kerr, John Letham, Edward Lingsby, William Elkin, Michael Murphy, and Joseph Syms, (foreman.) The jury proceeded to view the body, after which the following evidence was adduced:-

Mary Ford, sworn, deposed: I am the wife of Wm. Ford, lodging house keeper, of Albert street. I knew the deceased young man, who came to reside at our house Saturday, the 18th instant. He occupied an upper room, in company with three other young men, named Henry Gillespie, Andrew Lonsden, and George Lord. An adjoining room was occupied by Francis Furlong and Mr. Roberts. Deceased arrived in Auckland by the ship 'Surat' about a month ago. He followed no occupation, but had been engaged in hawking jewellery on commission for a Mr Jenkins, who was a fellow passenger of deceaseds, and brought the goods with him. The deceased young man was of regular habit, and took his meals regularly with the boarders. He slept at our house every night but one, which he told us he spent on board the ship 'Glendevon' with some friends. I never saw him intoxicated. He partook of breakfast and dinner yesterday and seemed to make a hearty meal. He had roast beef and vegetables for dinner at the usual hour. I noticed nothing peculiar in his appearance. There were some half dozen young men sat down to dinner with him. He had no fermented ... at dinner time. He was naturally of a cheerful turn, but I imagined he was a little duller yesterday. He left the house about two o'clock, alone, and returned in about half an hour. I did not seem him, but was told by my step-daughter, Emily Ford, that he had passed up stairs about that time. I did not know myself that he was there until about five minutes past three o'clock, when I was in my own bedroom on the first floor, and was startled by hearing cries proceeding from the upper story, of some one in distress. I went up stairs to the room occupied by deceased, and saw him on his back in bed, clutching his hands and legs convulsively and shrieking as if in agony. I said, "Sam, what's the matter?" to which he replied, "I am poisoned; I am poisoned"; and cried out for water. I took up a tumbler from the dressing table and ran down stairs to fill it with water. On reaching the tank I observed some white gritty substance adhering to the side of the glass. I cleared the glass and filled it with water immediately. I ran up stairs with it, and saw deceased still writhing convulsively. I asked him to take some water, but received no reply. He appeared to be in great pain. I then called my husband, who was in the yard, and wished him to run for a medical man. My husband came up-stairs and saw deceased, and then ran off for a doctor. In a few minutes after Mr Furlong came into the room. He had been asleep in an adjoining room at the time, and was awoke by the cries of deceased. Mrs Spittle, a neighbour, also came in. Deceased only spoke twice, saying, "Mother, mother, pray for me." When I took hold of his hand he cried out, "Don't touch me; don't touch me." When my husband returned with the medical man (Dr Philson) it was about twenty five minutes past three. Mr Furlong and myself were present when Dr Philson came into the room. Deceased was then much more composed at this time, and answered several questions quite rationally. I heard him say, in answer to an interrogation by the doctor, that he had taken strychnine. He said also that he had obtained it from M. Delattre's homeopathic chemist, of Queen-street. He said he told him it was to kill rats. When asked why he took it, he replied that Mr Ford knew. I did not hear him say how much strychnine he had taken. When asked where the bottle was he said he had thrown it out of the window. I did not hear him make any allusion to destroying himself. Dr Philson sent to Mr Gundry's for an emetic, but deceased refused to swallow it, saying he could not open his mouth. The doctor tried to

force open his mouth, but the emetic was only partially administered, deceased offering great resistance. A second emetic was procured, but without effect, deceased still refusing to take it. By this time the fits had become extremely violent, and consisted of a series of convulsive shocks. It became difficult to keep him in bed, and three persons had to hold him down. He expired at twenty minutes to four. I was present at the time. I heard no mention of strychnine by the deceased before this time, and did not suspect him of any intention to perpetrate such an act. He was sensible within five minutes of his death.

Francis Furlong sworn, deponed: I am a stevedore, in the employ of Messrs Butt and Anderson, Queen-street Wharf, and lodge with Mr William Ford, of Albert-street. I knew deceased from his lodging at the same house for the last ten days. He slept in an adjoining room. I saw him at 9 o'clock yesterday morning, but took no particular notice of him. I was unwell yesterday, and went to bed after dinner. About three o'clock in the afternoon I was roused by hearing cries of distress proceeding from the room occupied by the deceased. I heard Mrs Ford come up-stairs and ask him what was the matter. It was about a quarter-past three when I went into the room. I there saw deceased lying on his back in bed, apparently in great agony, and frothing at the mouth. I took him by the hand, and tried to make him speak. He only said, "Mother, mother, pray for me." I could not induce him to say anything else. I noticed the colour leave his face whilst he was convulsed, and then re-appear shortly afterwards. The doctor arrived with Mr Ford shortly afterwards, and questioned him as to what he had taken. He said he had taken strychnine, which he had obtained from a chemist in Queen street for 2s. He said he told the chemist it was to poison rats. In answer to the question as to why he had done it he replied that Mr Ford knew. I never heard him say he had procured the poison himself, or heard him allude to such a thing before. An emetic was procured, but he refused to take it, and struggled against the doctor's efforts to administer it. He said his name was Samuel Wakeman, was seventeen or eighteen years old, and had come from Birmingham. He said, also, that his mother and father were still alive, and that he had been a warehouseman in Birmingham. He had some violent fits of convulsion, and expired directly afterwards. He was of a cheerful disposition, and never expressed any intention of committing suicide. I was aware of some dispute on the previous evening between him and a Mr Jenkins respecting a watch that was missing. He had been selling jewellery for Mr Jenkins. I heard the latter threaten to prosecute him if he did not account for the watch. Mr Ford was present during the dispute.

By a juryman: I heard them say there was a shilling or two in his pocket at the time of his death.

Sarah Spittle, sworn, deposed: I reside with my father, George Spittle, boarding-house keeper, in Albert-street. I am sixteen years of age. Was outside my father's house on the previous afternoon, when I heard that one of Mr Ford's lodgers had taken poison, and that the bottle was being searched for. I went to look, and found the tube produced underneath the bed room window. I can recognise the tube from its peculiar shape, and a crack it bears. There was no cork in it. It bore no label, and appeared to me to be empty. It was about three yards from the house, and might have been thrown from the upper storey window. I gave it to Mrs Ford. The bottle produced is the one I found. It is in the form of a tube.

Robert Elliott Fisher, sworn, deposed: I am a licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, and House Surgeon at the Auckland Provincial Hospital. I have been requested to examine a small tube or broken bottle, now produced, and proved to have been found near the house of Mr Ford. I observe a few minute particles of crystal coating the sides and bottom of the tube. Presuming that the particles are strychnine, I will perform the usual experiments in proof thereof. The witness then proceeded to analyse the particles adhering to the phial, by first dissolving them in a small quantity of diluted alcohol, adding two drops of

sulphuric acid to bring out the violet colour necessary to prove the presence of strychnine in the crystals obtained from the phial found by the girl Spittle. A violet tint was immediately produced. Further experiments were tried. Examination continued: From these experiments I do not feel warranted in acknowledging the presence of strychnine in the crystals which are so minute in quantity that the bi chromate of potash test was unsuccessful in its development. The solution was, however, a decidedly bitter taste, which quite agrees with the known properties of strychnine. The surgeon went on to view the body.

Mary Ford was recalled to identify the bottle produced as the one given to her by the girl Spittle on the previous day.

Theodore Delattre, sworn, deposed: I am a homeopathic chemist, doing business and residing in Queen-street. I recollect a young man, about 20 years of age, coming into my shop on Wednesday evening last, at about half-past 7, and asking for two shillings worth of strychnine to kill rats with. I furnished him with about five grains of strychnine, which I weighed out in copper scales, and placed in a tube like the one produced. I cannot identify the tube produced, because it is broken and is similar to all those used by homeopathic chemists, of whom there are several in Auckland. I corked the tube, and double-labelled it with the words, "Strychnine," "Poisin." I received 2s from the young man. I will swear there were only five grains in the tube. I mean ordinary grains. I did not suspect that the young man intended to destroy himself. There was nothing in his manner to indicate that. I would not have served him if I had thought so. The shutters were up at the time, one door closed, and only one light burning. I cannot tell that the quantity furnished was sufficient to kill a person. I am aware that strychnine is a strong poison. I have only sold it on three occasions since I came to Auckland nearly three years ago.

By a juryman: I do not remember selling strychnine to a Mr Walski. Examination continued: I do not think I would remember his features, or be able to identify him.

By a juryman: I was in my shop yesterday afternoon, but sold no poison to anyone.

Examination of Robert Elliott Fisher continued: I have made an external examination of the body, and found the head drawn backwards, the trunk arched, the limbs extended, and the hands strongly clenched. The lower jaw was partially open, but rigid. There was some frothy matter arising from the mouth and nose. The pupils were slightly dilated, but otherwise natural. The face and neck were very livid, and the abdomen intensely swollen. There was an unusual amount of rigidity in the body. Had I been ignorant of the circumstances of the case, my suspicions would have been aroused that deceased had died from the effects of strychnine. There is no other chemical calculated to produce such appearances as this poison. Half a grain is sufficient to produce death. I do not think it safe for chemists to be allowed to sell poison indiscriminantly. From the experiments I cannot speak positively, but from the external appearances of the body I entertain no doubt that death was the result of strychnine. I consider the tube produced capable of holding more than twenty grains of strychnine. It is a light substance, and five grains would look very small.

Samuel Levy, sworn, deposed: I am a shopman, in the employ of Mr Asher, Shortland-crescent. I recollect being in Mr Delattre's shop in Queen-street, about half-past eight on Wednesday night. I was alone when I went in. Mr Delattre and a young man, who was a stranger to me, were present. Mr Delattre handed the young man a small phial, similar to the one produced full of an apparently white substance. In answer to the question of mine the doctor said it was strychnine. It was labelled "Poison" and Delattre said there was enough in it to poison a hundred or a thousand, I forget which. The young man remarked that he was plagued with rats. I did not know the young man.

By a juryman: Deceased looked about twenty years of age.

Theodore Delattre recalled, said: I have seen the body of a young man lying in a house in Albert-street, with the desire of the jury, but cannot identify it as the body of the young man who came to my shop on Wednesday night and purchased strychnine. I did not mean persons when I spoke of the phial containing sufficient to kill a hundred or a thousand, but rats. I have determined not to sell any more poisons to any person.

Samuel Levy, recalled: I have viewed the body of a young man lying at a house in Albert-street, and have no hesitation in saying it is the body of the young man I saw in Mr Delattre's shop on Wednesday night last.

William Ford, sworn, deposed: I am a lodging-house keeper, residing in Albert-street. Deceased was a lodger in my house, and had been with me a fortnight. He had transactions with a Mr Jenkins, who entrusted him with jewellery for disposal on commission. I purchased some articles myself, amounting to 10s. Mr Jenkins came to my house between seven and eight o'clock on Wednesday evening, and complained to me that the deceased had not accounted for several articles of jewellery. Deceased came up whilst we were conversing, and took Mr Jenkins aside. I do not know what transpired afterwards. Afterwards Mr Jenkins told me that there was a watch missing, and that he had arranged with Mr Wakeman (the deceased) to call on him next morning and settle the matter. Wakeman was perfectly calm that evening and did not seem to think much of the matter. He left the house that evening, and returned for the night about half-past ten o'clock. On the following morning he took his breakfast as usual, and at about ten o'clock I accompanied him to Mr Jenkins's lodgings to arrange matters. Mr Jenkins was willing to come to terms, and took a note of hand for the debt. The two parted without any disagreement. I never saw him the worse for liquor. He paid Mr Jenkins a sovereign, at my request, as I knew he had one in his possession. He had told me so, and said he intended to pay his lodgings with it, but I told him not to mind that.

William Jenkins, sworn, deposed: I am a Government interpreter, of Nelson, at present residing in Auckland. I knew deceased. He came out under my charge, from Birmingham, in the ship 'Surat'. He was between 17 and 18 years old. His parents are both living, and from them I understand he had been a clerk in a merchant's office. I arrived here on the 4th or 5th of the current month. My care of him ceased before leaving the ship, as he informed me he had arranged for a situation with Mr Fletcher on board; and, thanking me for my care, told me he should not require it any longer. On Tuesday last he came to me and said he had left Mr Fletcher, and wanted employment. I gave him an invoice of jewellery to arrange and on the following morning discovered that there was a watch and other articles missing. In the afternoon I had an explanation from him, but he failed to account for the property. He acknowledged having disposed of several articles of jewellery, but knew nothing of the watch missing. In the evening I saw him again at Mr Fords, and asked him to see me for a settlement on the following morning. On Thursday he came to me, in company with Mr Ford, and gave me the note produced, admitting a debt on sundry articles of jewellery, amounting to £5 18s, and paid me a sovereign on account. Shortly after dinner he saw me again, and said he had not taken any other articles than those named in the paper. His conduct is perfectly inexplicable to me. His parents are quite wealthy, respectable people, and entrusted him to my care on leaving Birmingham. The document produced is in deceased's hand-writing.

William Ford, recalled, said deceased had no property at his house, his boxes being on board ship still. The only papers found on him were given over to the police.

There being no further evidence, the jury returned the following verdict:- "That the deceased poisoned himself by taking strychnine, on the afternoon of Thursday, the 27th instant, and the jury would strongly recommend to the authorities the necessity of enforcing in this colony the enactments which are in force in England regulating the sale of poisons. The jury are also of opinion that the indiscriminate sale of such deadly drugs in the careless manner that has been displayed on this occasion should be prevented as soon as possible."

1851 Census 57 Upper Gough St, Birmingham St Thomas

John WAKEMAN	Head	34yrs	Journeyman Tallow chandler	b Handsworth, Staffordshire
Ann WAKEMAN	Wife	43yrs		b Birmingham, Warwickshire
John WAKEMAN	Son	11yrs		b Birmingham, Warwickshire
Charles WAKEMAN	Son	9yrs		b Birmingham, Warwickshire
Samuel WAKEMAN	Son	3yrs		b Birmingham, Warwickshire

1861 Census Kings Norton, Worcestershire

John WAKEMAN	Head	45yrs	Traveller	b Handsworth, Staffordshire
Ann WAKEMAN	Wife	51yrs		b Birmingham, Warwickshire
John WAKEMAN	Son	22yrs	Manager's clerk	b Birmingham, Warwickshire
Samuel WAKEMAN	Son	14yrs	Scholar	b Birmingham, Warwickshire

1871 Census 6 Shaldon Place, Mary St, Kings Norton, Worcestershire

John WAKEMAN	Head	54yrs	Commercial traveller (Tea)	b Handsworth, Staffordshire
Ann WAKEMAN	Wife	62yrs		b Birmingham, Warwickshire